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C O N F I D E N T I A L TEGUCIGALPA 000059

SIPDIS

STATE FOR PM, INR/B, AND WHA/CEN

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TAGS: [MARR](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [HO](#)

SUBJECT: SIGNIFICANT CHANGES IN SENIOR HONDURAN MILITARY LEADERSHIP, MAINLY FOR THE BETTER

REF: A. USDAO TEGUCIGALPA IIR 684199804 03

[1](#)B. 03 TEGUCIGALPA 2844

Classified By: Political Counselor Francisco Palmieri;
reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: On January 5, the Honduran Armed Forces made significant changes among its senior leadership, installing new officers in the positions of Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Inspector General of the Armed Forces, and Commander of the Navy. These leadership changes reflected the normal retirement process, the sidelining of a disgruntled officer, and the advancement of another officer for his superior performance. On balance, the changes should be beneficial for U.S. interests in Honduras. END SUMMARY

[1](#)2. (U) On January 5, the Honduran Armed Forces (HOAF) made significant changes among its senior leadership. Brigadier General Jorge Abelardo Andino Almendares was relieved as Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and replaced by Colonel Hector Leonel Pavon Lopez, formerly the Director of Operations on the Joint Staff. BGEN Andino was retired after thirty years of service. BGEN Luis Alonzo Maldonado Galeas was relieved as Inspector General of the Armed Forces and replaced by Colonel Nelson Willys Mejia Mejia, the commanding general of the Navy. Captain Jose Eduardo Espinal Paz, formerly the Chief of the Navy Staff, was selected to replace COL Mejia as Commander of the Navy.

[1](#)3. (C) Notable among these changes is the relief of BGEN Maldonado as Inspector General. He was considered by many to be the logical replacement for Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS), Major General Jose Isaias Barahona Herrera, whom President Ricardo Maduro and Minister of Defense Federico Breve had decided to retain in command of the HOAF for at least an additional year (ref B). This decision effectively assures that Maldonado, who has been openly critical of CJCS Barahona's policies and leadership style, will not be awarded a higher command. Maldonado will probably be assigned as a military attache to another country until it is time for him to retire, a common Honduran method of removing officers from contention for higher command.

[1](#)4. (C) COL Mejia's assignment to Inspector General is the most significant development for U.S. interests. It also indicates high-level approval for the way he has reformed the Honduran Navy. Mejia, an army artillery officer, took command of the Navy two years ago after a narco-corruption scandal left no suitable naval officer available to command it. The Navy, under Mejia's leadership, has had unprecedented success in interdicting narcotraffickers along Honduras' Caribbean coast. The appointment of CAPT Espinal to replace COL Mejia should also raise moral among the Navy rank and file as he is a career naval officer. However, CAPT Espinal is unlikely to be as dynamic as COL Mejia, and the Navy's counternarcotics successes may decline.

[1](#)5. (C) A widely anticipated personnel change that has failed to take place is the relief of Colonel Manuel Enrique Caceres Dias, Commanding General of the Honduran Air Force (ref A). COL Caceres has been under increased scrutiny for allegedly mismanaging Air Force funds. As this would have been the ideal time to replace COL Caceres, he will probably retain his command (pending no further allegations of malfeasance) for at least another year.

[1](#)6. (C) Comment: On balance, these changes should be beneficial to U.S. interests. Sidelining BGEN Maldonado was a wise move, but not replacing COL Caceres was questionable. COL Mejia has already expressed to DAO that the Embassy can come directly to him if they experience any problems with the Navy under CPT Espinal's command. COL Mejia's promotion to the IG job will enable him to continue being a positive force in support of U.S. counternarcotics objectives. End Comment.

PALMER